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MEDIA CONTACT: HOWARD JACOBS  
(323) 650-1979

**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA HIV ADVOCACY COALITION (SCHAC)  
ANNOUNCES THE PASSAGE OF AB 879 FROM THE ASSEMBLY  
HEALTH COMMITTEE**

*AB 879 Passes on 18 – 5 vote and moves to Appropriations Committee*

The Southern California HIV Advocacy Coalition praised the passage of AB 879, authored by Assemblymember Paul Koretz (D-West Hollywood), from the California State Assembly Health Committee. The bill would require the State Office of AIDS to develop a task force to create guidelines for post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) in cases of non-occupational HIV exposure such as inadvertent sexual exposure. Currently, the state has guidelines for victims of sexual assault and use federal guidelines for occupational HIV exposures of healthcare workers that make up a very small percentage of all HIV transmission cases. AB 879 now moves to the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

Assemblyman Paul Koretz (D-West Hollywood) said, "The federal government has delayed the release of PEP guidelines for non-occupational HIV exposures for over two years. Physicians need guidelines developed by a task force of our best research scientists, clinicians, prevention counselors, and public health officials. In the vacuum created by federal inaction, the State of California has a responsibility to provide physicians the tools they need to slow the spread of this pandemic. I am proud to advance legislation that increases our ability to prevent this life threatening illness." Assemblyman Koretz represents the City of West Hollywood, an area with the largest concentration of people with AIDS in Los Angeles County. Last year, he successfully passed legislation expanding Medi-Cal eligibility to include non-disabled HIV patients.

Gary R. Cohan, M.D., an HIV specialist and managing director of Pacific Oaks Medical Group, testified on behalf of AB 879 and the development of PEP guidelines. Dr. Cohan said, "In certain very specific, time-sensitive circumstances, I have offered PEP therapy to my HIV-uninfected patients after an accidental HIV exposure. The results have been quite encouraging as there have been no HIV seroconversions after PEP in over fifty patients and, even more heartening, a greater likelihood of safer sex practices than before the difficult and unpleasant PEP therapy cycle. I am glad the members of the Assembly Health Committee understand that doctors around the state urgently need these guidelines and must work closely

with HIV prevention educators to ensure all transmission strategies are being utilized as effectively as possible.”

Tom Peterson, co-chair of the Southern California HIV Advocacy Coalition, which is sponsoring AB 879, was elated with the vote. “Today we saw a bi-partisan voice of reason in support of an important strategy for HIV prevention. As the use of PEP treatment becomes more common we must not forget that HIV prevention is most effective when physicians and HIV educators work together to stop as many new infections as possible. The Assembly Health Committee was thorough and deliberate with their questioning and I believe they understand the value of developing non-occupational post-exposure guidelines as a way to slow the spread of this pandemic.”

SCHAC is a coalition of AIDS service providers, activists and people infected with HIV who advocate for sound and reasonable HIV public policy. For more information about AB 879, contact Teresa Stark in Assemblyman Koretz’ office at 916/319 –2042. For information about SCHAC or AB 879, please contact Howard Jacobs at 323 /650-1979. SCHAC members include AIDS Services Foundation Orange County, Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center, AIDS Project Los Angeles, Being Alive, Desert AIDS Project, AIDS Healthcare Foundation, Whittier Rio-Hondo AIDS Project, the City of West Hollywood and the Office of AIDS Programs and Policy of the County of Los Angeles. Last year, SCHAC successfully sponsored AB 2197, a bill that would expand Medi-Cal for people living with HIV.

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